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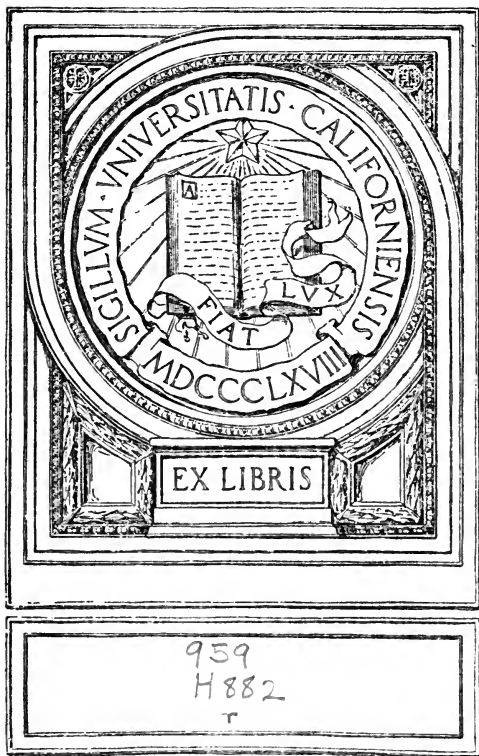
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*Rough Trails* ::  
AND  
:: *Silver Meadows*

BY

LEYLAND HUCKFIELD

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# ROUGH TRAILS AND SILVER MEADOWS

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BY  
LEYLAND HUCKFIELD

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MICHIGAN

TO MY  
FATHER

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## MID-WESTERN



## RIDING WEST

Half a score of us were roaring a drinking song  
With the iron-wheeled scrapers clanking a mad refrain,  
And ever the trampled ground gave back that din of  
    sound,

Flinging it into the dusty air again  
Like an echo of agony throbbing on and on,  
For we were riding West where never a wheel had gone  
And where never the ghost of a trail had ever lain.

We loomed against a flaming Autumn sky  
As we swung steadily over a prairie swell  
On through clouds of hoof-tossed alkali  
That stung like evil dust from the trails of Hell:  
Back behind us we heard the teamsters yell,  
Heard the creaking of tugs and the ringing of chains  
And saw the loaded wagons lurching along.

We felt the cool night wind and the prairie weeds waved  
    slowly

And the flame of the sun went down as the breeze arose,  
And now we rode through a world that was weirdly holy  
Where the song and the curses came to a lifeless close:

Only the clanking and ringing of iron things  
Never ended but mocked at the darkening land,  
Clanging a strident tune that all could understand —  
A prophecy of multitudes tramping behind a plow —

Over to the south of us we heard a rushing of wings  
And saw the dim triangles of wild geese beating away  
To waters farther west, blood-red with the dying glow:

And our pounding hoofs boomed doom to the solitudes  
As the grading outfit swung by rise and hollow;  
A ragged, a vermined crew, hardened of heart and thew,  
Steadily riding West — with the rest of the world to  
    follow.

## DEATH-SONG OF THE MAD GOD WHO MADE THE GRAND CANYON

Oh! I am the god who so mightily trod —  
Trampled Chaos and tore it asunder,  
Rose from the mire and the mists and the fire  
Reeking with heat and throbbing with thunder;  
Who drank the blood of the league-long things  
That came to bathe in the boiling springs;  
To whom as a thorn was the dinosaur's horn;  
I, who was born in the scalding gloom  
And flung from the terrible flaming womb  
Of the Mother of Doom — down under.

I ravaged the world and the rocks I hurled  
Broke gold from the sun in showers,  
And I hated the moon so I murdered it soon —  
The moon with its damnable flowers —  
The flesh of Earth's herds made gargantuan feasts,  
For ever I harried the mightier beasts;  
Roaring and raving, wandering, I  
Swore that their bones in the rocks and rivers  
Of Earth forever should lie.

Where the valleys were lit with flames of the pit  
I trampled the carcasses gory,  
I lurched and I swung till the madness I sung  
Broke my heart with its passion and glory;  
But I roared till the night was a-quiver with fright  
And I vowed I would die, as I'd lived, in my might;  
So I broke from the mountains their pinnacled walls  
And tossed them to Hell with wild, bellowing bawls;  
And the devils came up through the fire and the smother,  
Dancing in flame and chasing each other;  
Oh! all the devils in Hell were by  
To see the Mad God mightily die  
Who was born of the Old Mad Mother.

DEATH-SONG OF THE MAD GOD WHO MADE THE GRAND CANYON

From each blazing bog, through the blood-red fog,  
From my bottomless caves of plunder,  
The gold I hauled and the flesh I mauled  
And piled them in horrible wonder;  
I mixed them together, I piled them high  
From the floor of Hell to the roof of the Sky;  
Roaring and howling, happily I  
Made out of chaos a Thing that never —  
Never — never can die.

## BREAK-UP IN THE SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN

The morning came in crocus flame above the prairie's rim,  
Though all about our blackened shacks the shadows still  
    were grim,  
And with the day, from far away, a grinding roar began  
That shook the earth till from each berth leapt forth a  
    cursing man,  
And we raised a mighty shout, for the ice was going out  
And hell was breaking loose in the South Saskatchewan.

The great floes clung and smashed and swung and charged  
    on either shore,  
They were as creatures of the deep unseen by man before,  
They tossed and broke in splinter-smoke, they heaved and  
    ripped and ran,  
It seemed as though the dawn had chanced upon the weir-  
    wolf clan —  
As though vast wolves and fierce white bears went  
    through Saskatchewan.

They gnashed and crept, they writhed and leapt with  
    dripping jaws thrown high,  
Till crashing thunders rocked the bluffs and split the  
    morning sky,  
In frightful ranks they gored the banks and surging fast  
    began  
A grinding, growling, roaring rout behind their awful van  
Of horrors white that clawed the spine of cowed Saskat-  
    chewan.

## THE COFFER-DAM CREW

Fifty below, and an hour to dawn;  
Three black-beamed derricks, stark and hard,  
Lean above us and bar the sky:

We are the night-gang, the coffer-dam crew,  
Picking and pounding as devils do,  
Scraping forty feet down under  
The whirring derricks' rattle and thunder,  
And far down under the river too.

Dignity of toil? Be damned!  
Muscles stiff with the creeping cold;  
Heavy picks in rock-jarred hands,  
And the shift a hundred ages old:  
Noses blistered down to the bone,  
Cheek-bones raw from a rubbing mitt —  
Here's where the wheezing boozers groan,  
Down on the dead-line of human grit.

Steady hiss of the engine steam,  
Chunk and thlug of a ceaseless pump;  
We are the souls in Hell's extreme —  
Stick to the job, or starve — thump — thump.  
Thirty minutes to seven o'clock,  
Fires of endurance nearly dead,  
Pick — pick — pick — at the ice and rock,  
The foreman — Fate — scowls overhead.

The day gang's here: We seek our lair —  
And it's sixty below, as the dawnlight shows  
At the rickety shanty a mile up-shore —  
Oh! grinding god of the grim white snows,  
What the devil d'ye think we care?  
Give us coffee and let us snore.

## NORTH — NORTH — NORTH

North — north — north —  
Plunging towards the Pole;  
The horses pound and the oxen plod  
And the tin-horn crooks and men of God  
Are all on the muster roll.

There's sound of the usual things  
That lie in a wagon bed;  
Iron that chinks and rings  
Like broken chains of the dead;  
And clatter of household tins,  
And tinkle of hidden glass,  
And feet as heavy as lead  
Tramping the prairie grass:

And lean, white-bearded men  
Stiff with their years and sins,  
Chew and mumble, and mumble and chew,  
And rumble tales as they always do  
When the sap of manhood thins.

'Forty crowded years ago  
Up from Iowa they came;  
Young and lank and bullock-strong,  
And ripped the tough Dakota plain  
With bellowed curse and crack of thong:  
Upsprung the rustling lakes of grain,  
Its promise changed to flame of gold,  
But ease was cursed until they sold  
And faced the Northern trail again.'

North — north — north —  
Into Saskatchewan;  
Rolling over the Border Line,  
Baggage and beast and man:  
Rolling up on the Old Bone Trail  
In the wake of the buffalo —  
Grim-eyed men in the power of prime  
Plunging into the snow.

NORTH — NORTH — NORTH

North to the site of Medicine Hat  
To build them a flimsy town;  
To hammer it up in the freezing Fall  
And next year hammer it down:  
On in front of the grading crews;  
On while the land was young —  
Night and day on a wagon box  
With a star at the end of the tongue.

North — north — north —  
Under the sun and moon  
I saw them raising the shacks and tents  
Of an early Saskatoon:  
Hammering mightily, breeding there,  
Breaking the sod and seeding there,  
And ever with gamblers' eyes  
Peering afar for a fateful star  
That hangs in the Northern skies.

North — north — north —  
They were going, and still they go;  
They are breaking the far Peace River lands  
Where it's seventy-five below —  
Where it's seventy-five below  
In the Borealis glare,  
They have broken the sod, and by grace of God  
The wheat is greening there.

North — north — north —  
Far up in McKenzieland,  
There may be a plot where the soil is hot  
And a crop of grain may stand;  
And the lean old men with creaking bones  
Will out of their chairs and go,  
Buckle traces to blind old teams  
And head them into the snow —  
Into the heart of a lonely land  
That leads to the lifeless Pole,  
As long as a weary foot may stand  
Or a creaking wheel may roll.

## SPELL OF THE RIVER

When you have dreamed for a night by the mighty Mississippi  
Take up the wanderer's bundle and lock the homestead door;  
Open the gates of the pasture and let the beasts go free  
And turn your feet to the river road that leads to the heaving sea,  
For you have done with the valley farm for ever and evermore.

You are thrall to the river, the slave of his rolling flood;  
Bound to his glistening silver breast and chained to a flashing blade,  
For the croon of his midnight music has drifted into your blood,  
And the surge of his soul has drowned your soul as though it had never been made.

Dip your paddle, or swing your oar, or hoist a canvas sheet;  
North to the blue St. Croix or south to the flats of New Orleans;  
Nothing will ever be half so fair as what lies on before,  
Be it the Falls of St. Anthony or the old Missouri shore  
Or banks where summer blossoms blow till all the river is sweet.

Spring, with the tassels dropping fast from leaning willow sprays,  
Silver lights and silver rains and fleece-flocked April skies;  
Silence of swooning summer nights in shadow-haunted bays  
And days when red October's gold upon the water lies.

## SPELL OF THE RIVER

Had you song? What need of a song when Mississippi  
sings?  
Thunder thrilling his tawny deeps, his shallows trilling  
refrain —  
Love of beauty and peace that fled with coming of evil  
things?  
Turn to the river and beauty and peace shall enter your  
lives again.

Would you solve the spell of the River? — Go learn the  
drag of the sea  
That calls to the salty blood of men since ever a keel was  
laid —  
But — set your feet to the river road and the end of the  
tale shall be  
That the surge of his soul engulfed your soul as though it  
had never been made.

## THE FORD AT SASKATOON

The edge of the world lay hid in purple haze  
When we came down to the ford at Saskatoon,  
But the tops of the poplar bluffs were all ablaze  
With a deepening orange glow that lit the river below,  
For the stars were huddling back from a giant moon.

The creak of the wagon poles was blasphemy from hell  
Tearing the dreaming winds of a new found land,  
And the clinking, rusty chains were fetters of unknown  
dead

Tramping beside the wagons on either hand:  
It almost seemed as though the slushers were clanking a  
knell

As we came down to the ford at Saskatoon —  
It almost seemed as though we heard a tuneless bell  
Tolling beneath the darkness under the moon.

Somewhere back on the trail a straw-boss cursed us all  
With the thin hyaena whine of a weak-willed fool;  
We heard the sucking feet of a hundred teams  
Descending steadily in unending line —  
And then the arching boughs of the willows immersed us  
all

In the gloom of a haunted mine  
Beflecked with scattering beams.

## THE FORD AT SASKATOON

And so we came to the ford at Saskatoon  
And marked the light in a shack on the farther shore,  
And heard Saskatchewan with her hungry croon  
And put our foremost team at the swirling flood —

\* \* \* \* \*

And now, whenever we map the river, we draw it in blood,  
And that is the true tint of the South Saskatchewan;  
For we can hear the cries of the drowned men evermore,  
We can hear the rusty chains clinking under the moon,  
And shiver with dread of a treacherous trap as when we  
stood  
Peering for Death by the ford at Saskatoon.

## OFF CATALINA

On this enchanted tide  
I pray my soul may ride  
When the long life-day is done,  
Then will I wanton wide  
Among the purple hollows  
And the white gull that follows  
Shall be swift to keep my side:

And when from those rich valleys  
I leap great ridges golden,  
Bright foothills of the sea,  
I shall not lonely be,  
For the vast depths beneath me  
Shall glow till they bequeath me  
The glory of the olden  
Castilian chivalry;

(For where the kelp waves slowly  
Are secrets dim and holy —  
For children looking down  
Have seen strange children playing  
By weed and bright hued stone,  
And bearded men in helmets  
That ever pace alone  
In the wide ocean gardens  
That are of far renown.)

Then in gay grace shall rise  
From each battered galleon  
The adventurers of Spain  
With their puncheons of old wine,  
And their treasure streams shall flow  
From the velvet gloom below  
And shall heave and glow  
On the brine:

OFF CATALINA

And the great Pacific moon  
Will kiss each pale doubloon  
As it magically swings —  
For her delight and wonder  
Are still in ancient things,  
In the stately ships of plunder  
And the scarlet robes of kings,  
In the splendor and disdain  
That will come to earth again  
When the souls of men again  
Have wings.

Oh, nightly shall my soul —  
Though it be too sweet a doom —  
Drift like a fleck of foam  
Through the empurpled gloom;  
When has each gallant Don  
To his lost galleon gone,  
And the moon has drunk her fill  
From the wine cup of the sea,  
Then will I find my rest  
In a cove my eyes have seen,  
Where lurks a mystic green —  
For I know these hidden waters  
With most mysterious sheen  
Have once a sea-king's daughter's  
Enchanted love-pool been.

Then shall all motive cease,  
And I will lie at peace  
All the day long,  
Till comes a twilight song  
From the unfathomed deeps  
And from far mainland heights  
The dying sunlight creeps —  
And come the flashing stars  
And the bright moon —  
And Catalina lies  
In mists a-swoon.

## THE SONS OF DAN

Through great sun-blinded valleys where bones of the  
lost are strewn,  
To lurching of white-topped wagons and din of household  
pans,  
To lowing of stumbling cattle, whip-crack, and bitten  
groan,  
The Mormons march with the Lord of Hosts in the dust  
of their caravans.

Their broad-brimmed hats with the tattered rims are  
white with alkali,  
They ride in a cloud with the sun before like an olden  
lure of flame;  
They thirst and choke while the women crouch by pallets  
where madmen die  
Through arrow, and fever, and fortune-thrust for the  
glory of God's name.

Ever and ever the scouts drift in with long black guns  
unslung,  
With tangled beards and red-rimmed eyes that have out-  
stared Death's own,  
And the wagons wheel as the horses leap, urged on by  
lash and lung,  
And the charging Kiowas divide on a ring of fire-flecked  
stone.

Arises a chant where flame-beds glow to the God of the  
Sons of Dan;  
Deep coulees throb to thundering hymns that shake the  
prairie sod;  
And the vast black night that closes down like evil doom  
of Man  
Quivers long to a battle song of the grim old Mormon  
God.

## THE SONS OF DAN

For these are the Men of the Covenant, of the Word and  
    Avenging Sword,  
They ride to the blast of Gabriel, on way to a goodly vale,  
By trails of death, by lonely plains, past floods with  
    never a ford,  
They follow a splendid prophecy, a flame, and a Holy  
    Grail.

And the word of the prophet is certain; they shall build  
    an abiding-place,  
They shall make them another Jerusalem, with a taber-  
    nacle of prayer;  
And the Men of the Lord shall raise them up new seed of  
    a mighty race  
And the Sword of God shall go with them wherever the  
    bugles blare.

There are bones where the wagons rumble, there are  
    skulls in the prairie grass,  
But on they roll through storm and sun in the might of  
    a firm accord;  
For the Sons of Dan shall greatly thrive whenever it  
    comes to pass  
That they raise them a splendid city to the glory of the  
    Lord.

## THE BALLAD OF A WALKING-BOSS

In a rickety rig on a cloudy day,  
With freeze-up hurrying down,  
The walking-boss and a straw-boss came  
Joggling into town;  
Come racketting into Saskatoon  
And straight for the Queen Hotel,  
Knowing the place was half saloon  
And the other half was hell.

Down, down, went the rot-gut rye  
As fast as the bar-keep set 'em,  
And the walking-boss with a bleary eye  
Could scarcely wait to get 'em;  
They set 'em up and he put 'em down  
And every lick seemed sweeter,  
But the little straw-boss he giv' out  
And went to sleep by the heater.

And the slusher-men and the teamsters come  
With all the trash that are,  
And some were strong for the Grand Trunk Line  
And some for the C. P. R.,  
And some of 'em swore by old Jim Hill  
More'n they swore by the Cross,  
But the favorite names was 'Dan and Bill'  
That hired the walking-boss.

And this was the Fall of Nineteen-eight  
When the times was slack and slacker,  
With grub-stakes low and credits so  
It was hard to get tobaccer;  
But the walking-boss had come to town  
And it looked like something brewing,  
So we hung around and we hung around  
For whatever was up and doing.

## THE BALLAD OF A WALKING BOSS

And after an hour the boss come out  
And he staggered a bit and swayed,  
And his blind eye goggled and rolled about,  
And this is the speech he made:  
At least, it's part of his speech, though he  
Didn't talk as the preachers do,  
And some that he said was a langwidge dead  
To all but a grading-crew.

"Lads —" he roared, till the sidewalk shook  
With the sounds stentorian —  
"Here I am and I works, by God,  
For them devils, Bill and Dan:  
Twenty years in this damned land  
I've scorched and frizzled and friz  
In a hundred above to sixty below  
As the way of the country is.

"Twenty years in the sand and clay  
Of one or another line,  
Shoving and driving a right o' way  
On grub as 'ud sicken swine;  
Cutting sleugh-hay to feed the c'ral  
Till the hosses up an' died,  
And whenever they fell the harness bruk  
Or the string 'ud come untied.

"Rot — rot — in the cooking-pot  
And the tents forever in holes;  
We didn't care for our bodies much  
And we figgered we had no souls;  
We was raw and red with the prairie itch,  
We was grey-backed head to toes —  
Oh, some may talk of the torment rack  
But we old graders *knows*.

## THE BALLAD OF A WALKING BOSS

“Some of the time we’ll get our pay,  
Most of the time we won’t,  
But we’ll never starve till Doom o’ Day  
If Bill and Daniel don’t —  
We may get sick with the pizen stuff  
That comes through the cook-shack door,  
But them as survives ’ill be so tough  
That they’ll live for evermore.

“So come along — y’ grey-back crew —  
I’ll hire y’ every man,  
I’ll baste your hides as I always do  
For the good of Bill and Dan:  
I’ll feed y’ grub as a dog ’ud scorn,  
And drinks as ’ill taste like brine;  
I’ll make y’ wish y’ had never been born  
But I’ll build the Goose-Lake Line.”

And in we went to the swimming bar  
And the boss he paid the bill —  
They set ’em up and we put ’em down  
With a grab and a right good will;  
Till, one by one, they carried us out  
Where the trail to camp began,  
Where the walking-boss was sobbing about  
The glory of Bill and Dan.

## ENGLISH



## AVON MEMORIES

Gaffer Perks on his chain of land  
Smokes his pipe in the church's shadow;  
An old Brown Bess in his gnarled left hand  
And a tilting eye for rooks that fly  
From the trees down by the haulme meadow.

And the Avon flows silently, gently down,  
Passing on, passing on,  
With leaves from the elms of Stratford town —  
And Godfrey's bell tolls gloomily.

The long fields surge with dark-green wheat,  
Knee-deep meadows softly sway,  
The Cotswolds glow with copper flame  
And the gale dies with the dying day:

I hear the voices of wandering lovers  
Round the willow hidden bends,  
Here and there a silent shape  
Crouches low in the reedy covers —  
As it was in olden times  
When the cowed freres came  
And fished by dreamy Avonside,  
And heard the nightingale begin  
With the first convent chimes.

Slow — low —  
Through the dewy gloom,  
Music falls from grey old towers  
Upon knighthood's crumbled tomb  
And hidden fields of flowers.

It is a land of dreams,  
Dark hills and magic moors,  
Of Druid oaks and streams  
Flowing to ancient shores:

## AVON MEMORIES

There is mystery here in the dusky lanes  
About that time when the May-bloom falls,  
For, when the eye sees no thing pass,  
There is sound of feet upon the grass:  
Riffle of lace and shirr of satin,  
Lilt of French and drone of Latin,  
And ring of steel on vanished walls;  
And, at times, in the pulsing quiet,  
Hedges shiver with ghostly riot  
Of mad, barbaric strains  
From buried banquet halls.

This is a land where queens have journeyed  
In blossoming-orchard-times of old,  
To music of rich pageantry;  
Through the valley riding down  
With passing glint of gold.

From Tewkesbury up to Stratford town  
In the keep of Bredon Hill,  
If in dark of dawn you listen  
You can hear the shrill  
Piping of the morriss dancers  
On the winding river road;  
You may see the spangles glisten  
Though the dancers' feet are still.

And if you were not born among  
Avon's scattered fairy rings,  
And cannot see the elvery  
Nor hear the pagan strings;  
Still, when from straw-thatched cottage roofs  
The slow blue wreaths arise  
In the dim hush of April morns  
Like breath of sacrifice —  
And the dark hills encircle you around —  
What need to whisper to the wise  
That here is haunted ground?

Ripples in the shallows by the bridge  
 Where the road goes up to Cropthorne on the hill,  
 Summer haze and ladysmocks  
 And clack of Fladbury mill —  
 And cackle of grey geese in the meadows,  
 And gold and purple mists upon it all,  
 And cows going home through the shadows  
 That softly — softly — fall.

Hark! Hark! Godfrey's Bell!  
 Far — how far — it seems:  
 Still it tolls for Avon's souls  
 A grim and steady Saxon knell —  
 And — now — it tolls my dreams.

## THE LABORER IN THE MISTS

Toiling throughout the day, wet with the fogs of November,  
With a brief, white, muffled sun looming at height of noon,  
And somewhere, hidden but near, plum boughs dripping  
in rhythm —  
Laboring in the mists, with a joy that it's pain to remember.

Laboring in the mists; spading the loam and dreaming  
Of glorious days to be for the great, gay, loving Earth;  
When the minds of men should be free and the gates of  
beauty be open,  
And good should mightily reign, from a throne unshakable streaming.

And then home through the dark, with the mists still falling,  
And the lights of the cottages gleaming, cheerily yellow  
and warm,  
And to see, ere the gate clicked as it heavily swung behind me,  
My mother's form in the doorway, and hear her anxiously calling.

And then, when the meal was done, to rise from the fire  
red-glowing  
And pass out into the clinging, drizzling murk again  
And tramp almost till morn, though never a star was  
shining,  
And ever to stride with a vision about me flaming and  
flowing.

. . . . .

## THE LABORER IN THE MISTS

But to labor still in the mists, with dreams and the joy of  
dreaming,  
And the chill fogs thickening ever, the visions distant and  
dim —  
And the heart-glow smothered at nightfall, and no voice  
fondly calling,  
And forever, a burden of thought, and no light in the wide  
world gleaming?

## AN APRIL NIGHT

Some loose thatch on the farm barn fluttered as we went  
through the lane  
And the sweet, wet stars looked down, like the lights of  
Malvern town  
After the warm-breathed valley has been washed by twi-  
light rain.

Far up the tops of the elms were roaring, a hundred feet  
or so,  
And the old barn's battered vane was creaking a wild  
refrain  
As it pointed away to the hills where the waning moon  
was low.

And little we recked of dripping branches and brown mud  
under our feet,  
For we walked to the pulse of Spring — an aching, riot-  
ous thing —  
In a dim Arcadian quiet filled with the ripple of green  
wheat —

Till we came to the broad highway that leads from village  
to sleepy town  
And lingered a moment there like lovers that unaware  
Come to an ancient, magical road that leads to a land un-  
known:

For the broad highway went winding away to where the  
low moon shone:  
Like a ribbon of bridal white it ran through the fragrant  
night,  
It ran through the fragrant night, it seemed, to the moon,  
and on, and on.

But the yellow moon drew down at last the long black  
hills behind;

And, treading the dewy sod, it seemed that a lovelorn god  
Was abroad — for a far-off nightingale was flinging his  
soul on the wind.

And the apple blossoms were falling, falling, and drifting  
into the lane —

And we walked like lovers dead — who had not, living,  
wed —

We were too full of awe to kiss when we came to the house  
again.

## HAUNTED REAPING

Out we go in the dusk of morn  
Over the hills to the reaping,  
Our sickles crash on the golden corn  
When the rest of earth is sleeping;  
Bending and bowing, bending and bowing,  
Gathering in and striking free,  
Gripping the sheaf with the sickle and knee  
And laying it down for the tying.

The dim, dark hills are all around,  
The silence breeds a sullen dread,  
The sickle strokes like shrieks resound  
In chambers of the murdered dead.  
But one dull star stays overhead,  
The waning moon seems all awry;  
The dying night is loth to die  
Though in the east the mists are red.

Over the stubble chill winds creep  
Like breaths from a dead world blowing,  
God! it is awesome so to reap  
With such strange fancies growing.  
Bending and bowing, bending and bowing,  
Gathering in and striking free,  
Gripping the sheaf with sickle and knee  
And laying it down for the tying.

My father reaps six feet before  
With hairy arms as hard as steel,  
I hear the corn as oft of yore  
Before his whirling sickle reel;  
And, God! what wild, mad horrors steal  
Bidding me take too long a stride  
And drive my sickle in his side  
And grind his face beneath my heel.

## HAUNTED REAPING

I dread this brooding, awful morn  
With its haunted hush dismaying —  
It seems as though pale souls newborn  
Our curved wet blades were slaying,  
Bending and bowing, bending and bowing,  
Gathering in and striking free,  
Gripping the sheaf with the sickle and knee  
And laying it down for the tying.

My father's beard is grizzled grey —  
It trails like mist in heavy wind —  
He was three-score yesterday,  
And yet I reap six feet behind.  
Lean he is, and bent, and lined,  
And he has held me many years;  
And still I toil in hate and tears,  
And still he swears that he is kind.

Ah, God! will morning never break?  
I know he is old and loving,  
Yet I hear, with every stroke I take,  
A demon with me moving;  
Bending and bowing, bending and bowing,  
Gathering in and striking free,  
Gripping the sheaf with the sickle and knee  
And laying it down for the tying.

At last! The morning comes at last!  
The hills are rich with filtered gold,  
And through the vales a glory vast  
In glowing might is swiftly rolled;  
And hard my father's hand I hold,  
And standing 'midst the gleaming corn,  
With him thank heaven for the morn —  
With lips that still are grey and cold.

## OH! FOR A DARK-GREEN HILL-TOP

Oh! for a dark-green hill-top close to the sky  
And the song of bronzy bees in the golden gorse  
And bleating of new-born lambs in the waving fern  
And warm winds blowing out of a purple waste,  
And, deep and dim, away in the Western sky,  
A dancing silver gleam from the distant sea,  
And a faint breath of the salt air thrilling me  
As in a time gone by.

Oh! for a dark-green hill-top close to the sky  
And the valley beneath me filled with April foam  
When plum and cherry and pear blossom smothers the  
land;  
And an olden madness drifting through my veins  
And an old song on my lips as the twilight falls,  
With longing for dim paths and daffodils  
And sweet wild roamings on the lonely hills,  
And trysts in darkened lanes.

Oh! for a dark-green hill-top close to the sky  
And cool winds on my throat and the night-time near  
And the white fog of the lowlands creeping higher,  
And all about a rustling sea of fern  
Till alone of the wide world left is a tiny isle  
Moored on a spectral flood that is silent and cold  
Till the dreams of youth are mine and the magic of old —  
That sleeps such a long, sad while.

## THE TRAMP GIRL

She had come traipsing through the morning mist  
Out of a dewy by-lane; head held high,  
A gaudy handkerchief around her hair,  
And a blue bundle swinging in her hand;  
Like some wild gipsy wench from Hungary.

I was in one tree, she was in another,  
Both of us tanned and lithe as savages;  
And her quick eyes came dancing to my own  
Until my heart pulsed faster, and, shame-faced,  
I stopped awhile to take her basket down.

Of course I had to climb the ladder rungs  
To pass the wicker measure-back to her,  
And if one brown arm found a curving waist,  
And if her lips were riper than the fruit —  
What would you have? I was well past sixteen.

The wind came singing through the glossy leaves  
Of that old plum plantation on the hill,  
Set coppice-like above the valley lands  
That lay half brooding in September haze.

Close down below us, in among great elms,  
The villages lay nestled.

There was Moor  
And Upper Moor, and Wyre, and then one saw  
The spire of Pershore Abbey, and away  
Far to the west, the blue of Malvern Hills.

Dimly, and to the right, the Wrekin's peak  
Quivered in mist and scarcely could be seen;  
While, to the north, Throckmorton's thatch appeared  
And Abberton's tall steeple speared the sky,  
A landmark for the carters round about.

## THE TRAMP GIRL

Hillfurze and Fladbury, Cropthorne, Elmley Castle,  
Mossed roofs, grey stones, black beams and white-washed  
walls

All huddled in among the yellowing trees;  
And, like a brush-mark drawn around a bowl,  
The line of Broadway Hills that gently dipped  
To join the slopes of Bredon: in that gap,  
Farther removed, the Cotswold's stony fields  
Faded at last in amethystine haze.

A clean wind blew and set the ladders swinging;  
The golden fruit swayed into swaying hands;  
And I had ceased to pick, for she was singing  
Like some bright bird arrived from fairy lands;  
Seated upon her ladder's highest rung  
Among the moving boughs and lightly clinging —

“Eyes like diamonds, teeth like pearls;  
There's none that can beat 'em  
The Donegal girls —”

Eyes like diamonds? Yes! and stars, and dew,  
And veils of falling water which the moon,  
Rising above black woodlands, filters through.

Oh! she sat singing there and half-reclining  
Under the drooping fruit and swayed in tune  
And with the rhythm her brown arms went twining  
Among the leaves and her dark hair was blown  
Towards my face.

We two were all alone  
As on a mountain island near the sky,  
Swinging in heights of magic forestry.

All that day long she sang, or told me tales  
Of dusty roadways winding through the hills

## THE TRAMP GIRL

Of Derbyshire, and craggy paths of Wales  
Where one might stand and watch white specks of sails  
Creep into distant Bristol-by-the-Sea.

She knew of lonely farms in hidden vales  
Where good-folk lived who kept to bygone ways,  
A hundred years or more behind the times:  
There she would dance and sing old English rhymes —  
Often of highwaymen and press-gang days —  
I can remember a stray verse or two  
Rendered in the true quavering ballad style.

“The press-gang came for William  
When he was all alone,  
They beat him and they bound him  
And took him for their own —”

And then a ribald one; supposedly  
Sung by a country girl who went to hire  
At Stratford Mop — ’Twas called “The Bed-Making” —  
I begged her in sheer shame to leave the last  
Long stanza out; but, no, she had to sing  
It twice as loud — and I have always thought  
The village girls picked up that melody.

Out of a wanderer’s repertory  
She sang ‘Lord Bakeman’ dwelling on his joys  
Among the lovely Saracens — and then  
Swung to a legend, written — who knows when?  
To explain the short life of a willow tree.

Once her mirth died, and for a little while  
She talked of childhood in black Dudley streets,  
Of frowsy slatterns, cops, and drunken men;  
And how, one day, she watched gay caravans

## THE TRAMP GIRL

Rattling through town and saw the gipsy folk  
Happy and brown, in ragged gaudery.

That was the end of grimy brick and stone —  
A short week later she was cuddled close  
Among the bilberry brush of Lickey Hills.

Then her mood changed; she whistled like a lark  
And burst into a ditty of the day  
Not two weeks out of London — changed again  
And sang as sweet and pure a lullaby  
As ever crooned a baby into sleep.

Slowly the shadows lengthened through the valley;  
The wind died down, until a drowsy calm  
Drifted upon us in late afternoon:

And she ceased singing, but went on and on  
With tales of wandering —

Into Somerset

And lovely Devon, where pink apple-bloom  
Drifts through May sunshine, and old hawthorn trees  
Shake down their petal clouds in grassy lanes.

But when she spoke of the sea I hid my eyes  
And hardly heard; because I saw white sails  
Coming and going, as ever in my dreams,  
And felt the salt sea-blood within my veins  
Pulsing to England's stubborn heritage.

And when the Autumn dark was almost falling,  
And trooping from all directions, pickers came  
Down to the weighing place; when sieves were piled  
And, trudging lane and road, the village folk  
Went home to lighted windows — then I looked  
For my dear wanderer; called, and called again,

THE TRAMP GIRL

And did not find her in the grassy lane  
Where she had sworn — between kisses — she would be;  
And never found her:

God! what passionate grief  
Swept me and seared me all the haunted night  
That set my feet upon the final road  
Where, until death, the free go gipsying.

## LAST LOAD HOME

Through the darkening hawthorn lanes  
Come the rolling, groaning wains  
With heavy horses plodding on —  
Like steeds that tread the paths of Doom —  
“Last load home — Last load home —”  
Hay and maids and meadow bloom,  
And brown-faced men that tramp along  
To a rare old pagan song  
That thunders through the falling gloam.

Slowly comes the summer moon  
And peers into the scented shadows,  
Into sweet and ancient meadows  
Where the ghostly mists arise,  
Till up and down the Roman road  
The silver tangle shifts and quivers  
Like the light of magic rivers  
Flowing through a haunted land:

It creeps upon the swaying load  
And on and ever on it follows  
Over hills and through deep hollows  
Where the song is like old bells  
Echoing in deserted shrines,  
And ringing down forgotten wells  
Where the moonlight never shines.

The harness jingles measuredly,  
The whistle-trees and wheels complain,  
And close behind with pikes on shoulder  
Trudge the sturdy country men;  
Once the moon is dimmed and then  
Through half a mile of blackened shade  
We pass into a time far older —  
Hearing half-familiar things —

## LAST LOAD HOME

The crash of hoofs; the clang of steel  
Beating on an armored knee,  
And woven chain that chinks and rings  
A grim barbaric melody,  
And, back behind where pikemen tread,  
A steady chant of drunken song  
That mocks the flesh of distant dead:

But down the hill towards the mill  
To music of a silvery weir  
The load rolls on, the song roars on,  
And cottage windows are aglow,  
And through the gloom the thatched roofs loom  
In a shaggy Saxon row  
Beneath the church tower's Norman frown;

And in towards the ricks we go,  
Swaying down the rutted road,  
Moonlight all about the farm,  
Moonlight on the spreading elms  
And fairying the lurching load —  
And through the chorus, beating slow,  
“Last load home — Last load home —”  
A rhythmic murmur seems to flow  
Like music of the enchanted loam  
That shook with battle long ago.

## OIL OF MAN

(English Folklore)

Steal the skull of a murdered man  
Before the magical juice of his brain be dead;  
And do it in windy dark of a summer morn  
With no stars overhead:  
For if light shall shine on the grisly thing  
You hug in the crook o' your sleeve  
Under your arm it shall gibber and dring  
And moan and bitterly grieve —  
And if you should not heed its cries  
But still, and still, go on,  
It shall set its pale teeth over your heart  
And suck till you be done.

But if no light shall shine upon it  
Before you reach your room,  
Then that thing shall be sodden and silent  
And you shall mold its doom.

You shall bolt your doors and shutter your windows  
Till all be tomby still, —  
And take a dried root of monkshood,  
And sprigs of rue and gill —  
And burn them on a smouldering fire  
To thwart the thing's illwill.

You shall set the skull in an oaken clamp  
That was beam of a gallow's tree;  
You shall take an auger and slowly bore  
Until you come to the moldy, damp,  
Thick-clotted mystery.

You shall scoop it out with a weasel's leg  
That was trapped on graveyard soil —  
Then you shall crouch by the low red fire  
And chuckle to hear it boil —

## OIL OF MAN

And if you stir it more than thrice  
You never shall get the oil.

Three dark hours it shall simmer and bubble  
And you shall three times name the dead —  
You shall three times name your trouble  
With hands upon the grisly head —  
Then shall you take the cauldron off  
And drain the dreadful stew,  
Three times three through a silver sieve  
Shall pass that frightful brew.

Then, as it cools, a glimmering glow  
Shall light the silver pan —  
And you shall stare and shiver and mow —  
At sight of Oil of Man.

## THE LAND OF PLUMS

This is the land of plums: all England knows  
Its magic beauty; like a mighty loom  
Of giant fabric changing with the days.

First lady elms burst out in blossoming sprays,  
Half buds, half flowers, and shake their pollen down;  
And last year's leaves are tossed about and whirled —  
Along the sunlit streets of Pershore town.

And so comes April. High on Scarry Bank  
One sees red shawls in lanes of snowy bloom,  
Where village women hoe the mellow soil  
On every curve and hollow of the hill  
Under the fleece-flocked blue of laughing skies.

Slope after slope; as far as eye can see;  
From Evesham to Tewkesbury, up and down,  
All Avon's Vale is white with fairy showers  
Of petals that continually blow  
Upon the vale-folk stooping to their toil.

The centuried elms of Fladbury rise above  
The Norman church's square of crumbling stone,  
Half hidden in a maze of loveliness —  
Even upon the graves pale blossoms press,  
As though through some slight mystery of love  
That scatters fragrance on the forgotten dead.

Plum petals in a laughing girl's brown hair,  
Plum petals blowing in at cottage doors,  
Plum petals drifting down on daffodils —  
Sweet petals floating, floating everywhere  
In that white valley cradled by dark hills.

## THE LAND OF PLUMS

Autumn is here: the shocks stand in stray fields:  
The roads are dim with dust; the loaded drays  
Forever come and go.

Fast ripening fruit  
Cloys the warm air in these ambrosial days.

Purple and yellow, golden-scarlet, red;  
Soft cloudy bloom, like mist against warm skies,  
Clinging upon the curves of glowing cheeks  
Cuddled in wicker baskets of brown hue —

Rich, meaty, luscious flesh as ever grew  
When Father Adam wandered Paradise;  
Juices like fairy wine of flowers and dew  
Ripened in caverns where no mortal eyes  
Ever have looked — nor shall till mirth is dead.

Somewhere a girl is singing in a tree  
Perched on a perilous ladder's topmost rung,  
Trilling an olden golden melody  
Dear to the ears of age, for it was sung  
In days when Sweet Nell Gwyn was sorrow-free.

In misty mornings on the Roman road  
You see the pickers coming, crook and pail,  
And hear a hundred dialects, with words  
That were long obsolete in Chaucer's time:  
A Glo'ster tinker rails at "thucky wench" —  
A barefoot hussy beating a black can  
And dancing to a quick old Lowland rhyme.

Her ragged 'man' comes shuffling slowly on  
Swaying a wrenching, gasping concertina —  
And, by his hair, it's plain that he has been a  
Guest of the Crown in days — or hours — bygone.

## THE LAND OF PLUMS

By Wyre's low Saxon church, and by the Cross,  
Jangles and bangs a yellow caravan,  
Filling the street with war of pot and pan  
Until it halts beneath a giant elm  
Just opposite the moss-roofed village inn.

(This was where Holland — Gipsy King of yore —  
Sent his fist crashing through an oaken door.)

After September things will settle down:  
Riot of picking-time a worn-out story,  
The rag-scum will have drifted back to town  
And left the valley to its Autumn glory.

And then the land will give its soul again  
To quiet brooding: last wet leaves will fall,  
Till, like a gentle curtain over all,  
Will droop the creeping mists, the silent rain.

## THE CAROL SINGERS

About the middle day of Christmas week,  
Often when evening lights shone through soft rain,  
We used to gather in our muddy lane  
Just where it joins the pebbly village street,  
Under the vast thatch of an ancient barn.

In lowered tones, not shrill, nor quite discreet,  
We village plagues would plan our wailing way,  
Discussing who was easily made sore  
By untrained banshees howling at his door;  
Who kept a terrier — unimpeachable —  
And who had apples still in winter store;  
Who'd give us cake and who would hand out pence  
And what the outcome if we gave offence  
By visiting the same place twice an hour.

Oh, well; we'd start. The blacksmith's house was first  
And four of us would treat him to 'Noel' —  
Misplacing aitches to a curious end —

“No-hell-l, No-hell,  
No-hell-l, No-hell — ”

And yet the blacksmith was our faithful friend  
And why on earth we should have done our worst  
Only the fiend that tickles boys can tell.

(He had great love of melody and was wont  
When through the village church his praise was poured  
In mighty thundering music to the Lord  
To shake down plaster on the baptismal font.)

Bless that good man's good-temper; never boot  
Firewood, or coal, or curses came our way,  
And so we'd leave him to his evening peace  
And seek the farm of one who had been soured  
By too much cider and too little song.

## THE CAROL SINGERS

This was the domicile of Old Man Gray  
Who had not mellowed in his autumn ease  
Only as does the crab-tree's acid fruit;  
And, though we hardly thought that it would pay,  
We sought to cheer him as we went along.

Therefore we chanted out an olden tale  
That he had maundered long, long years before  
After a gallon of some neighbor's ale.

Something about a rabbit he had stalked  
Round and around his barn one winter-time  
And time, and time, and time again been balked;  
Until he 'scrotched' his head and cackled glee  
And bent the barrel of his trusty gun  
To a right angle — did it with his knee —  
And then he'd stealthily, to give no sign,  
Fitted it neatly round the corner-stun  
And killed that rabbit, shot clean round the barn  
And hit 'his own self' in the lower spine.

(The old man had learned wisdom. Rest assured  
He made no sign whatever he endured.)

Then we'd go on and try the village store  
And sometimes we would be invited in  
And given ancient biscuits from a tin  
That had been in its place ten years or more:  
Oh, she was wise, that widow, wise as sin;  
If anything could quell our hideous din  
'Twas that dry gift — as stubborn as a door.

And now we'd reach the gate of an old house  
With carved black eave-boards, thatch and diamond  
panes  
And wattle-plaster walls squared by great beams —  
For we were not so far from Shakespere's home

## THE CAROL SINGERS

Where Will was wont to revel and carouse —  
In fact one imp preserved the revered name.

Then would be heard the too familiar strains  
Of that old carol — dear to English ears —  
    “Whi-il shepherds watched their flocks by night  
    All seated on the grou-ound — ”  
And next would come loud scraping on a floor  
And voices cursing heart and soul and brains  
Of us dear children singing at their door.

Oh, vile ingratitude: we brought them song  
And were rewarded by unleashed abuse —  
We fled, and met again, and wailed our hate,  
And howled a version that the ribald use.

    “Whi-il shepherds watched their turnip-tops  
    All bilin' in the po-ot,  
    A lump o' soot came rolling down  
    A-and spoiled the jol-ly lot.”

One day the rector caught us singing that:  
'Twas well for us His Reverence was fat.

By now we'd be in mood for further wrong  
And when — ‘Come, let us adore Him —’ failed to  
    please  
The village cobbler, we could change with ease  
To other words and accompaniment as strong —  
    “Oh, come let us kick the door in —  
    Oh, come let us kick the door in.”

But that would bring a chase, so we'd disperse  
Down foggy paths and meet at Robinhood —  
The dead know how that corner got its name —  
And somewhere by the church we'd hear a curse  
And then a woman's voice — “Why, Jim, for shame.”

## THE CAROL SINGERS

But when we stood by Goody Barton's gate  
Only the minstrel three who sang in choir  
Lifted their voices in a Christmas hymn  
As sweet and holy as the angels know;  
And when the old lady came her eyes were dim,  
Her lips were quivering, and she trembled so  
She scarce could fill our hands from a great plate  
Heaped with the toothsome stuffs that boys desire.

And when we trooped into the road again  
There was the cobbler — saying 'he had heard  
Us singing, and it minded him of birds  
Singing in the plum-trees after rain —  
His missis wasn't well, and couldn't stir,  
So would we come along and sing for her?'

Of course we went — perhaps a trifle shamed —  
And sang our hearts out and refused all fee  
And sympathised with them because some rogues  
Had been around there doing deviltry.

Then we'd go home, all munching, yet lamenting  
One thing; the absence of delightful snow,  
Most needful to a game of our inventing  
Which was, to make great balls and then to throw  
These high above the chimney-pots until  
One fell inside and, plunging down the flue,  
Squashed on the hearth-fire twenty feet below.

Heavens! how I recall the hullabaloo  
When one dropped into Granny Harding's stew.

## NIGHT MOODS



## THE OLD GODS MARCH

The grim gods of the past have arisen,  
The black swamps throb and the mountains boom  
And the dust from their iron-sandalled feet  
Shrouds the sun in a blood-red gloom:  
Out of the Northern mountain passes  
Flame the banners and glare the swords,  
The old gods march from their wild morasses,  
The old gods march with their ancient hordes,  
With scarlet banners and songs of death;  
From marshes white with the bitter brine  
The boar-herds gather, the wolf-clans whine  
Till the land is foul with their steaming breath:  
And the old gods bellow, the old gods roar,  
And the hills shake and the grey seas rave,  
For the old gods march with a thundering tread  
Whose echoes thrill in the nether wave,  
Shaking the bones of a myriad dead  
As in red days of yore.

Glare of torches in dead men's eyes  
And black nights lit by towns aflame,  
And things of horror and claws that tear,  
And reeking rivers that bloodily rise  
To the old gods' tempest blare.

Banners black with the blood and smoke  
High in the eddying battle van,  
And great swords red with the murder-stroke,  
And torches aflame as the night comes on —  
For the old gods march in the shame of man,  
The old gods march — sweet days are done —  
The fires of home or the fires of hate?  
There is no choice in the wide world — none —  
But we must stand where the old gods tread,  
In ranks of steel, and steady and grim  
Chanting the sweet, wild battle-hymn  
That the old gods hate and dread.

## PASSING OF THE MAD SINGERS

In the curve of a glooming cape we huddled and shivered  
and peered  
Seeing the grey souls of the Mad Singers embark  
From a dimly luminous shore, unsteadily shifting and  
weird  
And hearing forever a voice far-thundering into the  
dark —

“Out! Shove out of the bay! the gales are heaving the  
main;  
We will ride the crashing ridges through black sheets of  
driving rain,  
We will swing and glide in the dark curves of the grim  
sea valleys again.

“On! with might of madness and gasping glory of power!  
The harp of the tides is under our hands; it throbs and  
thunders of unknown lands,  
And the moon drifts and sways and lifts like a wet pallid  
flower.

“Swing her prow on a savage course till the South stars  
flutter and fade;  
The Pagan lore was a flame of truth in the world-life’s  
icy shade —  
For a god pulls at our plunging sail till the smoking ropes  
are frayed.”

And the howling winds of the world tore at the skies and  
sea  
All under the far-away glow of a mounting moon,  
And we saw their black prow lift like a chained Thing  
breaking free  
And heard from out of the wrath faint notes of an old  
mad tune.

## A MIDNIGHT SONG

I shall go mad at last through too much dreaming,  
With fret and stress of this insatiate brain,  
Burst clinging bond and dully clanging chain  
And pass to some far land with mad folk teeming:

There azure fields shall heave with golden roses  
Beneath white skies that know not sun nor moon,  
Yet, with the boisterous winds of afternoon,  
Great purple stars shall shade what sleep uncloses.

There shall be ruby ponds a-drunk with plunder  
Of silver lilies roseate to their stain,  
And drowsing leaves half-dead with that they drain,  
And milk-white fishes swimming those leaves under.

There shall be paths of ice through molten mazes,  
Black mountain peaks up-tilting that pale sky,  
And strange new fields with coins of gold heaped high  
That breed and seed beneath rich crimson hazes.

There shall be cliffs that front not foaming surges  
But lip the cleft whence greening vapor rolls,  
Foul with a myriad years of rotting souls  
And slow, sick winds weighed down by freight of dirges:

Ay, sinking lands and breaths of burning waters,  
And lakes of blood — wherein I shall bathe long —  
Float to the weaving of this midnight song  
To which, near soon, shall dance the madmen's daughters.

## A WINTER GALE

A gale roars from the sea and the hollow valleys are  
booming,  
The black wrack of the storm leaps out and harries the  
flying moon,  
The wind is like the thrust of Fate that forces Man to his  
dooming  
And, from some tangled ocean floor, to the weeds and  
wash of a dim white shore  
Grey things creep up, grey things creep out, and hunch  
themselves and croon.

There is sound of feet on the lonely beaches where sane  
men never tread,  
And a stealthy noise of clashing teeth that turns the flesh  
to snow;  
And weird light glows and comes and goes like lamps that  
lead the dead  
Through awful caverns of deep gloom in the vast dead  
depths below.

And above are the mighty winds that tear an ancient song  
from the sea,  
A terrible song, a secret song, that wise men hear — and  
die —  
A growling chant of the marching tides, a dirge and a  
prophecy  
Of glorious golden ages drowned and gone as leaves go by,  
And splendor of red days to come before the world wins  
free.

A heaving hope and a damning dread are riding the  
racing wrack,  
A surging drone and a driven moan comes out of a rift  
where stars are sown,  
There is horror adrift in that star-flecked rift that lifts  
from the savage ranges,

## A WINTER GALE

There is terror stark in the haunted dark that swoops  
when the dim glow changes,  
As the swift moon swings from vampire wings that hunt  
in her ghostly track.

A wild cry in the thundering woods that answer the bel-  
lowing wave,  
And a weird wail in the sweep of the gale like a thin song  
of the grave,  
A thin tune of a bitter thing that creeps where sick men  
rave:  
And the sea calls as the moon falls and the world gathers  
gloom,  
And on the beach those grey things screech their jests of  
mortal doom.

## THE BOGGING OF DEATH

All in a gloomy wood  
By Wur's morass  
And in the black rain I stood,  
For Death to pass.

I heard the hour of ten  
From far clocks boomed,  
Then all grew still again,  
By night entombed.

The heavy fir boughs dripped  
On my bare head;  
The unseen leaves I gripped  
Seemed drowned with dread.

And shiv'ring with desire  
And crouching low,  
I saw Wur's eyes of fire  
Dance to and fro.

I knew the tarn's green edge  
Whereby they glowed,  
Where runs through withered sedge  
A haunted road:

And shuddering with hate  
I knew the spot  
Where my love plucked of late  
Forget-me-not;

And, dank with horror's dews,  
Again my eyes  
Saw through the bubbling ooze  
A white hand rise:

THE BOGGING OF DEATH

And through thin lips my breath  
Like poison came,  
And for the throat of Death  
I leaned aflame.

I heard that old fool's feet  
Squelch in soft sod,  
And rustling sedges greet  
His groping rod.

Then from a sudden rift  
The wild, wet moon  
Through heaven seemed to drift,  
With cold a-swoon.

And as she cleft the night  
I leapt and clasped  
Death's form with such delight  
That my heart gasped.

I tore from his white bones  
The sombre cloak,  
With laughter for his groans  
The gaunt ribs broke:

By those grim sockets deep,  
Where never eyes  
Drooped with the bliss of sleep,  
I dragged my prize

Through mists, of poison bred,  
To that green spot  
Where my love gathered  
Forget-me-not.

There, where all treacheries lie,  
Death sank in slime,  
And until morning I  
And Wur made rhyme.

## THE SINGING SKULL

Golden glowing the high crags shone,  
Somewhere, far, a slow bell rang,  
And this was in a grim ravine  
Where every rock was like a fang —  
My Love picked up a splintered skull  
And this is what it sang —

“Dribble and drool — the world is old,  
The dead are better off by far —  
For I am one who lived in war,  
And who should better know than I? —  
Wisdom drips from the lips of a fool —  
Rather drops from rotting jaws —  
And this is as the Law of laws —  
Dribble and drool — dribble and drool.

“From darkness of the eternal mold  
The flowers push up, the flowers unfold,  
From muck of earth come beauty rare —  
Dribble and drool — dribble and drool —  
When did Beauty last for long?  
I have seen the singer die  
As rang the first chord of his song —  
His pean that should glorify  
The fields of earth and vanquish care.

“Dribble and drool — above him now  
The farmer drives his shrieking plow;  
The heavy hoof-beats boom above  
A brain that was the cup of love —  
Dribble and drool — dribble and drool:  
His brain lives on? His love lives on?  
Oh! in some dusty library  
With un-cut leaves a volume lies  
That, some Spring day, a girl may prize —  
For daintiness of looks maybe.

“Dribble and drool — dribble and drool —  
This is a skull that once held song:  
I was a singer and I sang  
Of woe and bitter, senseless wrong;  
And high and higher my voice rang  
In tones of One they crucified,  
And women heard with sympathy,  
But — men brought that same bloody tree  
And nailed me on it — and — I died.

“Dribble and drool — What matter now?  
The loose teeth rattle in my jaws;  
I raised a banner for a Cause,  
I poured my blood to bloat a sow.  
The drums of Freedom roared and rolled,  
We hailed the dawn of Liberty,  
We saw the tattered banners fold  
Above great piles of bloody staves —  
Dribble and drool — A century —  
And who are freemen? Who are slaves?

“Dribble and drool — (Oh! hideous eyes!)  
And you would follow where I fell?  
Go down to black oblivion  
That is the Singer's nether hell:  
Meet flouts and jeers with song and pride  
While Justice hangs her heavy blade  
Upon her scales and tips the side  
Wherein all woes of Earth are laid.

“Dribble and drool — I know the dream;  
It beckons and the Singer goes.  
It is the Light, it is the Gleam  
That every fettered spirit knows;  
The glamor of a deathless hope  
That out-lives shame and pain and scorn,

## THE SINGING SKULL

The radiance from a land that glows  
With glory of eternal morn.

“Oh, Singers! Earth may be reborn —  
Dribble and drool — But — I am dead.  
By you rich chaplets may be worn —  
But — lay me in a lonelier bed:  
Whereon no tyrant foot shall tread,  
Wherein no moan may penetrate —  
For I am sick with bitter thoughts  
Of creeping men that live by hate.”

The crags above were gray and cold,  
It was a dread and desolate land;  
I turned to my fair love, and she —  
Oh, God! was all in rags and old.  
The skull dropped from her withered hand,  
It crashed upon the awful ground,  
And those mad jaws clashed out again  
The Unknown Singer's last refrain —  
“Dribble and drool — dribble and drool —  
Wisdom drips from the lips of a fool.”

## A SONG OF DARK HOURS

Oh, Death, come soon —  
I am too sick of waiting  
Through sleepless nights of horror and of dread —  
Oh, Death, come soon :

Let me be gone before another June  
Fills this mad world with fragrance of its roses ;  
Let me lie still where human dust reposes  
Under the changing light of sun and moon.

Come, clad in ivory robes of bridal beauty,  
I am so weary of this whirling brain  
That night and day beats out a dirge of duty  
Through murderous hours of pain.

Oh, Shining Love, with the white clinging fingers  
That close the eyes in peace of lasting sleep,  
Fondle my hair, my brow, till I am deep  
In that long slumber where no memory lingers.

Here, in the dark, as in a bridal chamber,  
I lie with arms outstretched and open eyes ;  
I have long known the haunted path that lies  
To your abode, and heard thereon a tune  
Wailing that wisdom is the shrine of fools.

I have known passion like a searing flame,  
Felt Love's hot bosom crushed against my own,  
I have known wandering nights of raging shame  
And gripped red hands in darkness — and — alone —  
Have bowed me down before the altar-stone  
Of bloody hate — in hells that I have known —  
Oh, Death, come soon.

A SONG OF DARK HOURS

Let me be done, this night of madness passes;  
The light beyond the window-panes is grey;  
I shall be silent when the break of day  
Ruffles among dried weeds and lifeless grasses —  
Would that my sap had gone the selfsame way —  
Oh, Death — Oh, Death — come soon.

## THE GALES OF AUTUMN ARE COMING

The great gales of Autumn are coming —  
Bend, trees; bow to your sorrow:  
Fly, red leaves, — you die tomorrow —  
The gales of Autumn are coming:  
They have tossed and rolled and smashed the sea  
Till the sinking sun has bloodied a mad commotion;  
Only the vulture keeps the sky  
With straining wings and flaming eye —  
Foul, ragged ghoul of the darkening ocean.

Woe and chill on a shrouded earth descending  
And a nameless fear that steals with breath foreboding,  
A creeping whisper of death with love's dreams blending,  
A scattered rust that blows for the heart's corroding.

The air is filled with a distant drumming  
Of far birds beating southward fast,  
The world is filled with roaring and humming  
Of far winds thundering blast on blast  
Through groaning gulches of northern ranges:  
Ho! pines that have strangled the rocks, hold fast!  
The clouds are mad, the whole world changes,  
The great gales of Autumn are coming.

## THE FLEETS OF DOOM

Dark, booming beaches under evil skies,  
Clouds torn by the wind and the world a'roar,  
And fearful outlines heaving to far thunder,  
And all the West aflare with yellow light;  
And vast grey monsters riding seas of wonder  
Against the gloom of night —

And, sweeping down the mighty tidal surges,  
Froth-kissed as ever it veers,  
A weird wind wailing olden ocean dirges  
For souls of the buccaneers:

For bones of the buccaneers  
That lie in the Southern and Northern seas,  
For the wave has a love of savagery  
And reeking victories:  
And the wave's deep love for raging men  
And flame and clamor of grappling ships  
Is told in the ceaseless miracle song  
That rolls from her hungry lips.

\* \* \* \* \*

Then, sateless vampire, thunder thanks at last:  
Our blood must glut you, for the despairing shore,  
Riven and drenched by war's red-dripping blast,  
Whispers to heaven that it can hold no more.  
Stifle all greedy murmur: you shall be  
Rimmed with rich floods that shall out-glare the suns,  
You shall be poppy steeped with that which we  
Pour from the giant lips of roaring guns:

For, in dread harbors where your slow tides tremble  
Under the cold grey glances of the day,  
The grimly stark leviathans assemble

## FLEETS OF DOOM

In battle-stripped array;  
And in them slumbers pride of mighty sorrow,  
And round them rolls the heavy breath of Fate,  
And every hour holds promise of dread morrow  
And devastating hate.

## LURE OF LIGHT

The grey seas heave and roar and sway  
Under a dim cloud-shrouded moon,  
And the mad white froth of an evil bay  
Flashes across our lantern glow :

And Death's grim hands grip hard below  
At mortared seams of the yieldless stone  
While his voice in a low continuous thunder  
Tells the passing of all things known —  
Tolls all wisdom and dirges wonder  
And chants of Beauty's burial under  
Oblivion's starless snow.

Out of the grey night sea-birds blow  
And smash their wings on the lantern glass;  
Lured from the blackness of sea-wastes  
By hope of sunlight on green grass  
By shores where tepid currents flow.

And even so — and even so —  
We smash our souls and fluttering fall:  
Youth and beauty and wisdom, all  
That wings from out of the stormy waste —  
We seek for a light, we seek a glow —  
We ask what only the dead may know —  
And, whirling on with hope and haste,  
We smash ourselves on an unseen glass —

And like the crippled birds we go —  
Dust of chaos, blindly blown,  
We crash and fall to the mad seas under  
While Death with low continuous thunder  
Chants the passing of all things known.

## DAWN-LIGHT



## WHEN YOU HAVE DREAMED YOUR DREAM —

When you have dreamed your dream of fame and power  
And, wakening, find it life's late afternoon,  
And know that labor will be done with soon  
And that your hope is like a wilting bower;  
Rise from the agony of that bitter hour  
And force a smile and hum a wilful tune  
Of bygone nights beneath a magic moon  
When every sweet May meadow was in flower.

So shall you come at last to day's black end  
And foot the gloomy path that none retrace,  
And laugh, because lost loveliness walks beside;  
And those who follow on the way you wend  
Shall look upon your carelessness of face  
And mould their days to die as you have died.

## CERAMICS

I had made pause between two dusty shelves  
Before a smoldering glory of rich glaze,  
A plum-bloomed purple thing without design.

Ming? Oh, how the devil do I know?  
Only, before me sailed a fleet of junks  
With lateen sails hard cut against the moon,  
And white plum blossoms swirled like fragrant snow  
Against my face, and someone had my hand  
And tapped it lightly with a bamboo fan.

There was a golden window on before  
With purple lanterns swaying in its glow,  
And, somewhere near, a shingly river shore  
Tinkling with music of a myriad shells,  
And from some grove of jade a nightingale  
Mingled his notes with those of far-off bells  
Ringing, it seemed, from lands of long ago.

And then, behind me came some devotees  
Raving of Sevres, Delft, and Cloisonne;  
Mouthing of Paris and a thousand things  
That trouble art —

And so I lost my dream  
Just as the spreading of its rainbow wings  
Was sweeping me to mystery of Cathay  
Over the silver froth of magic seas.

## FROM A GARDENER TO A POTTER

We two have handled earth so much  
And won such beauty from its mass  
That we shall scarcely fear its touch  
When Fate may nod and bid us pass.

Rather, the clay and brave brown mold  
Will wrap us warm and work goodwill  
Until a thousand Springs have rolled  
Through the Great Potter's grinding mill;

Then we shall stir and slowly rise  
And feel the sun and wind and rain,  
And thrill with glory of blue skies  
We had not thought to know again.

And I shall live in grass and flowers,  
Because I loved them long ago,  
And drink my fill of silver showers  
And sway to all the winds that blow:

And you? Your fame for many a day  
Will fire the art of older lands,  
A wondrous thing of perfect clay  
Made by a master-craftsman's hands.

## THE SMITHY ABOVE THE MOON

Oh, God is beating on his anvil  
In His smithy above the moon,  
And the star-sparks fly in fountain showers  
And some are souls and some are flowers  
And some are chords of a tune.

An angel bends to the bellows  
And he puffs up golden clouds,  
And some float off through an amber glow  
And some drift down to the worlds below,  
And some are angel shrouds.

And the roof of the smithy is purple  
And its rafters are of gold,  
And the fire of the forge forever is fed  
From a blazing heap of rubies red  
That it may never be cold.

God's hammer is clanging on the anvil —  
He is calling up the souls of men —  
To left of the moon where the light is dim  
You can see them drifting up to Him  
To be remade again.

And He will bring them to the anvil  
In a hissing silver flame,  
And His blows shall shower them over the floor  
Until they fall to the Earth once more  
And magnify His name.

Oh! hear the ringing of the anvil  
Where the God-Smith beats above,  
For His blows are the pulse of mortal fate —  
And some men swear that He toils in hate —  
And — some — that He toils in love.

## TO A PARAKEET

Gabriel, I say — look well,  
For something I have loved with tears  
Is seeking Heaven's forestry.

You will know it, Gabriel,  
By its plumage golden-green,  
Like a sunbeam on green grass;  
You will know it, Gabriel,  
And when it comes to Heaven's gates  
Will smile and softly bid it pass  
Into God's valleys of sweet bowers  
And singing leaves and blowing flowers.

But, Gabriel, when dusk draws near —  
The purple veil that is not night —  
And the great silver stars look down  
Upon a host of folded wings,  
Go softly, that he may not fear,  
And coax him to your shoulder white  
And still his sleepy twitterings —  
For, Gabriel, I think that he  
Will miss my love and — even in Heaven —  
May droop and pine for me:

And, Gabriel, the shy wild things  
Of wood and hill that I have wept;  
Bright eyes, brown fur, and flashing wings,  
Have they not into Heaven crept  
And made their home in some green dell  
Where I may find them, Gabriel?

For I have loved with passionate  
Love, till I think — though red with sin —  
Christ for their sakes would swing the gate  
Of Heaven and, weeping, wave me in.

## BIRDS THAT CLEAVE THE SHADOWS

Turquoise tints in the heart of a golden rose,  
Carmine fire in a cool white lily cup;  
Something blown from out of the sun-drenched vales  
Of an old land whose flowers never close;  
And again the azure shadows are floating up  
And the silver of dawn drifts down,  
And comes a whirr of murmuring wings,  
A sense of unseen exquisite things,  
And a flashing of green and flame  
When the grey moths have flown.

From a dim, sweet land of love  
Where the Little People have gone,  
The Humming-Birds come through the dawn's blue dusk  
When Earth-Folk slumber on —  
Last of a reign of loveliness  
Where tiny souls for long  
Walked abroad in a petal dress  
And danced to the midge's song.

Now, from the glamor of olden meadows,  
From brooks where elfin herdsman sang,  
The Humming-Birds pass through the Veil of Shadows —  
The Humming-Birds — darting — alone —  
And the bent bells and the blooms half-blown  
Hear the echo of chimes that rang  
When fields of fairy seed were sown.

In the scented hush of a silver hour  
When the eyes of June are heavy with sleep,  
Oh, Love, Young Love with the face of a flower,  
Steal out to our secret garden glade  
And, bright on bud and heavy on blade,  
You shall see the tears that the Wee Folk weep.

But the sorrow of this shall not be deep  
When the last veils are drowsily drawn,  
And, flashing and droning, heralding dawn,  
Back to Earth come the Humming-Birds:  
Back to Earth from a fairy lawn  
Where tiny shepherds tend their herds;  
From golden vales by an amethyst sea  
That moves to a faint old melody —  
Back to Earth — darting — alone —  
Back from the sweets of elfin meadows —  
The bent bells and the blooms half-blown  
Bow to the Birds that cleave the Shadows.

## WHEN I LAY DOWN MY CRAFTSMAN TOOLS —

When I lay down my craftsman tools and pass  
And the wild life of Earth comes drifting in  
Upon this garden plot — like secret sin  
Into the tender soul of a sweet lass —  
When brambles weave and tangle to a mass  
Of thorny things, and trees shut out the day,  
And sad-eyed friends who loved me wend this way  
And find no flowers among the untended grass —

And ponder — with hearts murmuring ‘Alas,  
Beauty and brain have sought their common clay,  
All that he did was as a wind that blows —’  
Oh, then let memory see my garden as  
It was when breezes made the blossoms sway  
And all about was fragrance of the rose.

## THE MUSE IN CHURCH

The gates of brass are closed  
That guard the ivory altar;  
The great arched rafters frown on thee  
Who art the harlot's daughter:  
With lips like a carmine rose,  
With robes like orchids rare,  
With breath like spices delicate  
That languorous pagans bear:  
With thy petal cheeks aglowing,  
And with thy white knees showing,  
And thy soft eyes that falter —  
Go hence, enticing demon child,  
Thou hast not beads nor psalter.

## IN JANUARY FOG

There, the familiar black old chimney-place  
Yawning and huge, filled with mysterious shadows,  
And pewter mugs on the heavy mantel shelf  
And candlesticks and ancient willow-ware —  
And, in the ingle-nook — oh — boyhood's dream!  
A flickering glow of firelight on dark hair.  
And then the garden gate would creak, and we  
Would meet in silence as two shadows meet,  
And take the footpath over Bubble Bridge  
And watch the town-lights blurring through the fog.  
What if the foot-path was a squelching bog?  
What if the fog had changed to mizzling rain?  
We scarcely knew we loved, but it was sweet  
To wander so — and, so back home again.  
All under mist and rain and dripping branches,  
Soft hands, wet hair, and eyes as pure as dew;  
Shy words beneath the spreading cottage thatch  
And then you'd go —

I'd hear the clicking latch  
And see the firelight's sudden leaping glow  
And turn, in youth's mad chivalry of dream,  
And tramp the sodden fields all night — with you.

## THERE IS A GARDEN IN MY BRAIN —

There is a garden in my brain  
And I shall make, before I die,  
A thing whose beauty shall be pain;  
And men that feel its mystery  
Shall climb at midnight through black rain  
To sit beneath my twisted firs;  
Till when the breast of morning stirs,  
And when the winds of morning rise,  
They shall go down the hill again  
With dreaming hearts and staring eyes.

And when the golden bees awake  
To wander through my drifted blooms,  
And when the blossomed branches shake  
Their perfume into dewy glooms,  
And burden silvery spider looms  
And fill my paths with fragrant snow,  
Oh! then the feet of men shall go  
Slowly amid my gold and green  
As though in silent, sacred rooms  
Where ghosts of long-dead saints are seen.

And, softly, when the day is dead  
And flowers that love the dusk unfold,  
Softly, oh, softly, feet shall tread  
That leave no imprint in the mold;  
Nor blade of grass, nor leaf, shall hold  
Their dainty trace of shaken dew,  
But a strange fragrance, rich and new,  
Shall slowly flow through shadows deep  
Until the lips of night are cold  
And dim things tremble into sleep.









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